

THESIS GUIDELINES

Create a Proposal

1. Provide a summary of the work as it currently exists, e.g. chapters or scenes of a novel, play, or screenplay, or book of essays, or the type and number of poems to be included in a book of poetry.
2. Address what work remains to be done in order to produce a complete project.
3. Provide an annotated bibliography of 10 or more works you propose to read during the two thesis semesters.
4. Give an analysis of how your project engages with these other works in the same genre, contemporary or historical.
5. Set a prospective schedule for writing and turning in work during both thesis semesters.

The proposal should be 2500-3000 words in length.

Secure Thesis Director

By the second month of the semester after the student has accumulated 18 units, s/he will submit to the MFA Director and the prospective thesis director the proposal, requesting a thesis director. We will do our best to assign you the thesis director you request, but in order to distribute thesis duties equitably, you may be assigned a director and/or a second reader who are not your first choice. The MFA Director will appoint the thesis director and will also assign a second reader.

Changes to your thesis committee: If the composition of your thesis committee changes at any time, you must submit to the MFA Director a petition, stating the reason for the change. Changing directors is a rare occurrence and may not necessarily be granted once the project is underway.

Timing of Thesis Courses

Students must take their thesis units in the final two semesters of their time in the MFA in Creative Writing. They may not register for thesis hours if the requisite number of courses has not yet been satisfied. After 24 hours of coursework have been completed, students normally take one workshop or literature course in each of the final two semesters, and one section of CRW 296 Thesis in each. The thesis semesters are the culmination of MFA study, thus come at the very end. No exceptions will be made to this policy.

Write Your Thesis

Thesis Length and Content: Your completed thesis should be of substantial length and accomplished quality. In the case of a novel, memoir, collection of short stories, or creative nonfiction essays: 150-250 pages. In the case of a book-length poem or a collection of poetry: 60-80 pages. One page= 250 words. In the case of a play or screenplay: 120 pages in the appropriate format. The work you produce in your workshops will, most likely, form the basis of your thesis; however, you will need to produce more writing than you wrote for workshops. Therefore, you must plan carefully and work in concert with your thesis director.

Thesis Quality

No student graduates merely by accumulating units, nor by writing a certain number of pages. The norms above are minimum numerical standards, not sufficient in themselves, as partial criteria for completion. Equally important is the quality of your thesis, as deemed by your thesis director, committee, and the MFA Director as of publishable or producible quality. In some instances, students will be required to take a 1-unit third semester of thesis, if the project has not advanced sufficiently to warrant graduation. The project is done when the committee declares it is done. The committee has the right to request binding changes, in which case the student author must make and submit for a second review before the committee signs off. If the work is in satisfactory shape, optional changes will be suggested at the thesis defense, and the student will have 30 days to complete them and submit with the signature page, without a second review. For these reasons, it is of the utmost importance students understand that in working with a director, it is advantageous to be open and amenable to the advice given and changes requested during the two thesis semesters. Leaving sufficient time to revise and not completing a first draft at the last moment, will help you to avoid undue pressure in working up to the defense.

Reading List: In consultation with your thesis director, you must generate a list of at least 10 books, apart from those 10 you plan to read. This list of twenty should be annotated. These should be books you've read that have influenced your writing in some way. This list will reflect the scope and depth of your study of literature. Your reading list may include but should not be limited to work assigned in your classes and should be in MLA format. Some directors may request additional, new books to be read as part of the thesis experience.

Your list should be drawn from a variety of genres and periods in order to indicate the diversity of your reading. However, the works on the list may favor your chosen genre. This list will be distributed to your committee with your thesis and will be part of your defense. This list must, by the time you distribute your thesis to your committee, be in MLA format and included at the end of your thesis. Every thesis defense in the Creative Writing MFA Program includes a discussion of your approved reading list, and you should be prepared to answer questions about the relation of the readings to your thesis.

File Application to Graduate

The semester prior to your thesis defense, you should file with the registrar your intent to graduate and your course audit by the deadline. The registrar's office normally sends out these deadlines, but it falls to you in any case to be aware of them. All students must in addition present a complete list of courses taken and in progress to the MFA Director, no later than at the beginning of the final semester, to ensure that all requirements have been met for graduation.

<https://www.msmu.edu/academics/registrar/graduation-application/>

The registrar's office will also do a program evaluation, to ensure that you have met the course requirements for the degree. MFA requirements can be found at:

<https://www.msmu.edu/graduate-programs/creative-writing/degree-requirements/>

Defend Your Thesis

Scheduling Your Defense: Your defense must be scheduled no less than four weeks prior to its occurrence. At that time, consult with your thesis director to see whether the project is on track, and if it is, s/he will schedule a room. All thesis defenses will have been conducted by December 10, May 10, or August 10, depending on the semester. If your thesis is not finished by that date, you will be required to continue 1-unit thesis continuation the following semester.

Thesis Distribution: No later than two weeks before your defense, submit three electronic copies of the final draft of your thesis: one for your director, one for your second reader, and one for the MFA Program Director. The completed manuscript will include the accompanying academic preface, which will be 3000 to 4000 words in length, with endnotes in MLA format. The preface must be submitted at the same time as the manuscript.

Thesis Signature Page: Thesis guidelines, signature page binding instructions, title format and preface guidelines may be found

at: <https://www.msmu.edu/graduate-programs/creative-writing/thesis/>

You are responsible for printing and filling out the signature page prior to the defense and securing the signatures of your committee at or immediately after the defense. The MFA Program Director must sign, as well as your thesis director and second reader.

Submitting Your Final Version: After the defense, you have thirty days to make final changes. You will send a bound, printed version of the thesis to the library at: Director, Thomas J. McCarthy Library, 10 Chester Place, Los Angeles, CA 90007. A second copy should be sent as a PDF to: jpayne@msmu.edu

The Defense

The thesis defense explicitly ties the coursework required for the M.F.A. degree to the work of the thesis. It is designed to

1. assess your knowledge of contemporary literature and your particular genre as you have been studying those disciplines at Mount Saint Mary's University
2. allow you to articulate relationships between your own work and its literary contexts

Please note that the defense, lasting between 90 minutes and two hours, is meant to be a conversation. While preparing for your defense, you might consider the following questions:

- How has the reading for courses in the program influenced your work?
- What models does the thesis draw from stylistically? Structurally? Philosophically?
- What forms/procedures have you inherited from these models and where/how have you used them?
- What sets your work apart from theirs?
- What kind of literary contribution does the work aim to provide?
- Talk about your process for revising the manuscript in order to address particular problems and concerns. What options did you consider? How did you arrive at your final version?
- What presses/magazines do you think might be interested in this work? Please bring a list of these to the thesis defense and be prepared to talk about them.